

## Composer Mum – Sweet Dreams Bedtime Listening

A playlist curated by Dr. Jane Stanley

[www.janestanley.com/composer-mum](http://www.janestanley.com/composer-mum)

If you haven't already, please do watch my YouTube video explaining the overall concept behind this playlist.

<https://youtu.be/FCKDQfsGp6c>

This is the first of what I intend to be a series of playlists that I publish. I've designed this with my own children (ages 1 and 3) in mind, and I'm very happy to share my playlists with other parents/carers, nursery staff, really anyone who works with children. This sort of "curated listening" is an activity that I intend to develop as one of the threads in my **Composer Mum** project. In this list I have selected pieces that will be conducive to setting children up for a good night's sleep. But this isn't to say that it wouldn't be equally as applicable to adults too. None of the pieces in it are specifically made for children. A central aim in doing this is to provide my own children with a regular opportunity to immerse their ears in a broader range of musical repertoire. The fact that I repeat the same playlist over several nights means that they can really get to know these pieces. Once a few weeks have passed I will change the list so that my children can gradually build up their knowledge of other new pieces.

The majority of these pieces are drawn from what could be described as "contemporary classical" genre. This is mainly because it's the field I work in as a composer. I'm conscious that during the day (whether they are at nursery or at home), they often don't have much opportunity to listen to this type of music. Music on this playlist isn't exclusively contemporary classical though, as you'll see/hear. More generally, I simply aim to provide children with "novel" listening experiences, and to broaden their musical reference points (in the same way that we might introduce children to a wide range of flavours and textures).

I've made versions of the playlist for Spotify and also Amazon Music. Not everyone will have access to these platforms, which is why I've opted to release the information here as a downloadable document. You can feel free to draw from my suggestions and perhaps to construct a similar playlist, or even to explore work by some of the composers/performers included using some other platform. For example, if you're currently enrolled in an education institution you should be able to access Naxos Music's catalogue through your library account. Whilst I'm keen for everyone to be able to get hold of this music, it's important to keep in mind that musicians make their living from performing and recording, so I'm being

careful to recommend only those platforms that facilitate earnings for musicians through streaming.

Here's the Spotify URL:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1uVyxp0DnajRxRgJpqv7Af?si=jyrbh-w8TiyDlj5B9Z5ihw>

And here's the Amazon link:

[https://music.amazon.co.uk/user-playlists/b025129290fc46afb986ce5a76a7e054engb?ref=dm\\_sh\\_e47a-fda2-dmcp-2a70-b44dd&musicTerritory=GB&marketplaceId=A1F83G8C2AR07P](https://music.amazon.co.uk/user-playlists/b025129290fc46afb986ce5a76a7e054engb?ref=dm_sh_e47a-fda2-dmcp-2a70-b44dd&musicTerritory=GB&marketplaceId=A1F83G8C2AR07P)

**1. Préludes Book 1 L. 117: 6. Des pas sur la neige. Claude Debussy (1909-10). Performed by Vikingur Ólafsson.**

The title – *Des pas sur la neige* – translates into English as *Footsteps in the Snow*. I've chosen this because it was a piece that I really connected with as a teenager learning piano. It has the sort of calming mood that I'm looking to create at bedtime. It's from a collection of pieces called *Préludes* by Claude Debussy which were composed between 1909 and 1910<sup>1</sup>. You can easily identify the short recurring "footstep" motive at the start, and this runs throughout most of the piece.

**2. I Lie for small women's choir, by David Lang (2001). Performed by Ars Nova Copenhagen, Paul Hillier.**

The stepping theme continues in the next two pieces on this list, starting with a piece by David Lang, a New York-based composer. This piece is called *I Lie*, and in this Lang sets a poem by Joseph Rodnick.<sup>2</sup> I heard this song for the first time only in the last month or so on radio late at night. It's so arresting and striking in its apparent simplicity and sparseness, with phrases built from fragments of an ascending minor scale. What's most important for the purposes of this playlist is the atmosphere that Lang creates, especially at the start, which just seems to signal that it's time to slow down and calm down, to listen and to reflect.

**3. Études, Book 1: No. 4. Fanfares. György Ligeti (1985). Performed by Pierre-Laurent Aimard.**

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<sup>1</sup> Lesure, F., & Howat, R. (2001). Debussy, (Achille-)Claude. Grove Music Online. Retrieved 2 Jun. 2020, from <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000007353>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://davidlangmusic.com/music/i-lie>

Next up is a piece for solo piano by György Ligeti. A bit like Debussy's collection of *Préludes*, this piece comes from a collection of pieces called *Études* (or studies) which he started to compose in 1985.<sup>3</sup> This is one of the more active and energetic pieces in my list, which is why I placed it earlier in the order of things. It's really cleverly constructed, because throughout the whole piece is a rapid scale run that works as an **ostinato**. This ostinato gets "dressed up" in different ways. For example, at the start, the left hand plays the scale ostinato, while the right hand plays major chord, then the right hand takes over playing the scale while the left hand plays minor chords.

**4. *Durme, durme, mi angelico* - traditional (Balkans).**

**Performed by The Renaissance Players, Winsome Evans.**

The Renaissance Players is an Early Music ensemble based in Australia. This song is from the second of their Sephardic Experience CDs. It has all the sonic hallmarks of a beautiful lullaby, but it's really quite a sad song if you consider the lyrics (which are in Ladino, or Judaeo-Spanish), which of course a toddler isn't going to do. But once children are older this could be a good gateway into talking about Sephardic history and culture. Another ensemble who play this is Trio Sephardi, and their website includes a translation into English of the lyrics.

<https://triosefardi.com/text-and-translations/durme-durme-mi-angeliko/>

**5. *Quatuor pour la fin du temps: VIII. Louange a l'immortalite de Jesus* (In praise of the immortality of Jesus). Olivier Messiaen (1940-41). Robert Plane, Gould Piano Trio.**

*Quartet for the End of Time* is a piece that is often taught to students in music history classes as a "key" piece composed in the middle of the twentieth century (1940-41).<sup>4</sup> I've selected the final (8<sup>th</sup>) movement for this playlist. The instrumentation is interesting, being a combination of clarinet, violin, cello and piano. Messiaen composed this while he was interned in a prisoner of war camp during WWII, and he wrote for the instruments that were available and performed by other prisoners. This movement features just the violin and piano. The piano plays chords using a short-long, slowly pulsating rhythm, which reminds me of a heartbeat. Messiaen had a very

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<sup>3</sup> Griffiths, P. (2011, October 26). Ligeti, György. Grove Music Online. Retrieved 2 Jun. 2020, from <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000016642>.

<sup>4</sup> Griffiths, P. (2001). Messiaen, Olivier. Grove Music Online. Retrieved 2 Jun. 2020, from <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000018497>.

personalised approach to harmony. He is known to have been synesthetic (hearing colours as sound and vice versa), and his harmonic language was informed by associations with visual colour. His chords tend to be very rich, often using 5-8 notes. As this piece draws to a close, there is a gradual ascent in both the violin and piano.

**6. *Potrceno* (Macdeonia). Performed by The Renaissance Players.**

This is another track from The Renaissance Players. I like this because it is quick and pulse-driven, providing some contrast with the preceding tracks, but it's still gentle. It's in 7/8 meter, so you can feel the long, short, short beats (3+2+2) of each bar.

**7. *Fin Like a Flower*. Anna Meredith, text by Phillip Ridley. (2010)<sup>5</sup>. Performed by Michael Chance, Lucy Wakeford.**

This is a song for countertenor and harp. Flowing notes in the harp are set against longer, sustained sung tones. The exact duplication of recurring note patterns played by the harp is frequently disrupted, which creates a pleasing sense of rhythmic unpredictability. The overall atmosphere is hypnotic.

**8. *Darn That Dream*. Bill Evans. Performed by Bill Evans and Jim Hall. (1962)<sup>6</sup>**

This jazz number radiates warmth, calm, and reassurance. It's a duet for piano and guitar from Evans's and Hall's album *Undercurrent*. This piece was recommended to me by one of my work colleagues who specialises in jazz. I listened to this piece prior to knowing much about it, and I was actually surprised when I found out that there are just two players involved - there's so much going on texturally, in the exchange and layering of melodic lines/chords.

**9. *Sonatas and Interludes: Sonata 5* (1946-8)<sup>7</sup>. John Cage. Performed by Tim Ovens.**

(see below)

**10. *Sonatas and Interludes: Sonata 3* (1946-8). John Cage. Performed by Tim Ovens.**

I've included two of John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* in the list, because they are a great introduction to the sound world of prepared piano. John Cage modified the sound of a

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.fabermusic.com/music/fin-like-a-flower>

<sup>6</sup> Murray, E. (2001). Evans, Bill (i). Grove Music Online. Retrieved 2 Jun. 2020, from <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000009099>.

<sup>7</sup> [https://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work\\_ID=188](https://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work_ID=188)

traditional piano by inserting all sorts of objects, like nuts and bolts in between the strings of the piano so as to radically change the resulting sound. The first of these pieces has a mesmerising quality which makes it perfect for setting a bedtime mood.

**11. *Pierrot Lunaire*, Op. 21 (1912)/ Part 3: 18. *Der Mondfleck*. Performed by Christine Schäfer, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Pierre Boulez.**

As suggested by the title, a nocturnal theme runs through this song cycle. Twenty-one poems in all by Albert Giraud have been set. The song selected here is no. 18 in the cycle (*The Moonfleck*). In it, Pierrot is convinced that moonlight is stuck on his coat, and he chases his own tail in an attempt to flick it away. Consequently, the musical material conveys a strong sense of frantic agitation. This is a very short but concentrated piece (brevity is a characteristic of music that Schoenberg composed at that point in his career).

*Pierrot Lunaire* is an example of musical Expressionism. Painters were exploring similar themes in their work at this time. Throughout *Pierrot Lunaire* the soprano voice uses a technique called *sprechstimme*, which is basically a combination of singing and speaking voice.

**12. *As I Crossed a Bridge of Dreams*. Anne Boyd (1975)<sup>8</sup>  
Performed by The Contemporary Singers, Antony Walker.**

This is one of several pieces on this playlist themed around dreams. It's one of my favourite pieces for choir, composed by Anne Boyd who I studied with in Australia.

When I was playing this to my three-year old he commented that it sounds like "Frozen" (the movie). In particular I think he is thinking of the coronation scene where a choir sings.

**13. *In a Landscape (solo piano)*. John Cage (1948).<sup>9</sup>  
Performed by Alexi Lubimov.**

I didn't deliberately set out to feature so much John Cage (!) but while I was searching for pieces I came across this and thought that the dream-like character, which is sustained for nearly 9 minutes would be ideal for my playlist. I've placed this near the end of the list, as by this stage in my children's routine I hope that they are settled enough to start drifting off to sleep.

The pieces make significant use of the sustain pedal (allowing notes to 'ring on'), and this contributes to smooth and

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.fabermusic.com/music/as-i-crossed-a-bridge-of-dreams-1054>

<sup>9</sup> [https://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work\\_ID=106](https://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work_ID=106)

resonant musical character. Moderately-fast flowing middle-register notes are punctuated with periodic bell-like tones in high and low registers.

**14. *Spiegel im Spiegel* (version for cello and piano).  
Arvo Pärt (1978).<sup>10</sup> Performed by Alexander Malter and  
Dietmar Schwalke.**

If you're a regularly listener to stations like Classic FM (in the UK) you're likely to have heard this piece. I think it's fair to say that it's one of the most performed contemporary classical pieces out there. Pärt's style is very minimal and paired back, and in this piece you can hear the very simple broken triadic chords played on piano which accompany the cello's very slow lyrical melody.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/work/544/>

## **Activity 1:**

### **2-week observation activity of how your child responds to the playlist**

You might like to play this playlist every night at your child's bedtime and then note down any observations in terms of their response(s) to the music.

Here are some questions that might guide your reflections:

- Do they say anything (eg. I don't like this one)
- Do they react in some other way to any of the pieces (eg. any visible signs of them calming down or becoming more active?)

Day 1:

Day 2:

Day 3:

Day 4:

Day 5:

Day 6:

Day 7:

Day 8:

Day 9:

Day 10:

Day 11:

Day 12:

Day 13:

Day 14:

## **Activity 2:**

### **Listening Journal - for your own reflection**

Use this space to record your own responses to this music. For each piece, you might like to consider:

- words that describe the mood/atmosphere of each piece
- any associations that this music triggers for you
- any noticeable physical responses you feel (eg. makes me feel agitated/relaxed)

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**3. *Études*, Book 1: No. 4. *Fanfares*. György Ligeti.**

4. *Durme, durme, mi angelico* - traditional (Balkans).

5. *Quatuor pour la fin du temps: VIII. Louange a l'immortalite de Jesus*. Olivier Messiaen.

6. *Fin Like a Flower*. Anna Meredith (2010)

7. *Darn That Dream*. Bill Evans.

8. *Sonatas and Interludes: Sonata 5* (1946-8). John Cage.  
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